

The First Reformed Church of Hackensack  
Court Street  
Hackensack, Bergen County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer  
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

The First Reformed Church of Hackensack  
Court Street  
Hackensack, Bergen County, New Jersey

Owner: The Consistory (Rev. John J. Soeter, President)

Date of Erection: 1792

Architect:

Builder:

Present Condition: Rear extension 1847, interior  
remodelled 1869

Number of Stories: One and gallery, tower and spire

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone masonry  
in clay cement

Exterior walls - formal  
coursed ashlar tooled brown-  
stone, wood cornice

Interior walls - no partitions

Roof - gable and spire, with  
modern wood shingle roofing

#### Historical Data:

The land on which this building in the city of Hackensack is the third successively erected church was first acquired by the congregation in 1696, some ten years after their organization, and in the following manner: (Quote) Whereas the inhabitants of Hackingsack, New Barbadoes, and Acquackanonck are intended to build a church on ye land now in possession of Anthony Antonison, Now know All Men by these presents That I John Berry for me, my heirs and assigns doe hereby release renounce and acquit all claim interest and demand whatsoever that I

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now have or hereafter may pretend to have unto them one morghon of ye said land for accommodation of the said church. In testimony whereof I have hereunto affixed my seal and subscribed my name this 20th day of April 1696. John Berry. (Recorded in Bergen County Deed Bk. B, p. 78)

Bergen County as defined in 1682 extended from the Hudson to the Hackensack River, and was divided in 1693 into Bergen and Hackensack Townships. New Barbadoes Township, (in which was the Village of Hackensack), and Acquackanonck Township, both named above, were on the west bank of the Hackensack River, in Essex County, and were ceded to Bergen County in 1709, at which time that village became the County Seat.

Probably on account of this political change, a confirmation of the grant of the lot to the church as above quoted was made by a deed of 23 March 1712, by the same John Berry, described herein as "of Hakensack in Bergen County, gentleman", to "the said inhabitants of the towns before mentioned, to them and their heirs forever", reciting the previous grant of 20 April 1696, and hereby conveying to them "in consideration of the love and good will and affection which I bear"..... "a certain place of land lying and being in the Township of New Barbadoes.....formerly possessed by Anthony Anthonison", four chains wide by six and a half chains long northward from Dr. Johannes Van Burgh's "Kriek", between Leydecker's fence on its east line and Johannes Mier's on its west, the whole containing  $2 \frac{3}{4}$  acres, "English measure, be it more or less, for building a church." (Bergen Co. Deed Bk. B, p. 79). This tract included much of the present Court House green or square.

At the original organization of this congregation of the Reformed Dutch Church in 1687 under Dominie Petrus Taschemaker, thirty-three persons united to form the same, the elders appointed being Hendrick Jorense and Albert Stevensen, the deacons Hendrick Banta and Volkert Hanson. Guillaume Bertholf, who with his wife, Martyntie Hendricks had

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first united with the church at Bergen Town on 6 October 1684, bringing a certificate from the church at Sluis in Dutch Flanders, became the "Voorleeser" or parish clerk for the churches at Hackensack and at Acquackanonk (Passaic). The two congregations sent him back to Holland for theological study and ordination, and he returned in 1694 to Bergen County as their pastor and served until his resignation in 1724. He was notable as the only settled minister in East New Jersey of the Reformed Dutch Church. As such he was the missionary and founder of several of the earliest congregations. He died in 1725 and is said to have been buried under the pulpit of the church.

Some three miles up the Hackensack River, a French church had been erected in 1682, but was demolished when the eleven members joined this Dutch Church in 1696. The church building erected in that year on the lot just acquired in what became the village of Hackensack, as above stated, is said to have been rebuilt in 1728, octagonal in plan with a belfry at the apex of the roof. "In 1791, ..... the congregations of this old church on the Green engaged in a controversy over the building of a new church. While they were debating, the young people dismantled the contents of the building, piling the pews, benches and other movables in the center of the Green and treating the inhabitants to a huge bonfire. The new church reared its steeple to the sky in 1792. Over the entrance a red sandstone bore the coat of arms of the Dutch King, William the Silent, Protector of the Calvinistic faith, and below were inscribed the several building dates. Except for the enlargement made in 1847 and the minor changes in 1869, the building today is practically unchanged."(a) This remarkable tablet was originally set in the wall above the central

(a)Address by Francis C. Koehler, President of the Bergen County Historical Society, publ., in 250th Anniversary booklet program of the church, 1936

front entrance of the building of 1791, removed to the rear of the extension of 1847, and now on the eastern exterior wall was broken in three pieces by a stroke of lightning in 1795 it is reported. Over a crowned lion rampant is the inscribed motto Een-draght maakt mackt (Union is strength) and below it the date of the first building 1696 and of the rebuildings 1728 and 1792.(b)

In the churchyard are the gravestones of Dr. Peter Wilson the educator, General Enoch Poor, Robert Campbell the lawyer, Col. Richard Varick one time mayor of New York, Adam Boyd the statesman and jurist, and of the pastors Kuypers, Romeyu, Mabon, and others. The records of baptisms and marriages from 1686 have been published by the Holland Society of New York 1891, and those of marriages 1799-1878 in "Bergen County Marriage Records", 1929.

#### Architectural Analysis:

The first two church buildings on this site 1696 and 1728 are said to have been octagonal in plan peculiar to those of Dutch Reformed Churches, evidently inspired by that of the first protestant church built as such in 1595 at Willemstadt, Holland, as a simple auditorium under the violent reaction from ceremonial worship.

(b) Clayton and Nelson History of Bergen and Passaic Counties, 1882

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The Revolution having brought the inhabitants of the predominantly Dutch regions throughout Bergen County into contact with the neighboring English settlements of Newark and Elizabethtown, the Dutch builders in that County found much inspiration in the Georgian design that at its height of development in those two places.<sup>(a)</sup> Accordingly, the Dutch church of 1792 (here surveyed) which replaced the earlier one on the village Green in Hackensack exhibits the marks of that adopted style as is evident in rectangular plan, pedimented gable roof and central front tower. Comparison with the First Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth (1784), and Newark (1791), shows those notable examples of the style to have been the prototypes of the Dutch churches erected in Bergen County and elsewhere.

Some interesting stones carved with the monograms of David Des Marets, Jan Du Rij and of Jacques La Rou and others, evidently removed from the French church and set into the wall of the first Dutch church on this site, at its erection in 1696, when those three and other Huguenots joined the latter, have been preserved in the present edifice of 1792.

An illustration captioned "View of the Court House and Church, Hackensack", published in 1844,<sup>(b)</sup> shows the side elevation of the latter building as having then three gothic style two-center arch headed windiws fitted with multi-paned rectangular glass in wood sash and a similar pointed arch opening in the belfry. This evidence for the existence of these non-Georgian pointed windows previous to the alterations of this building of 1791 in 1847, probably precludes the supposition that they were changed thus from an originally semi-circular arch head or a flat lintel head at the

(a) See Wertenbaker, The Founding of American Civilization, publ. 1938, p. 81.

(b) Barber and Hows, Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey, 1844, page 81.

latter time. In that year, the building was extended to the rear as shown on our survey drawings, the window openings in the side elevations being reproductions in form and in brick trim of the first three. At the same time, the present gothic style frames having each a center mullion and leaded glass were introduced in the new windows and replaced the clear glass sash of the older ones. The use of pointed windows in otherwise Georgian style churches appears unique with the Dutch churches of Bergen County.

The interior of this church as remodelled under the pseudo-gothic influence of 1869 is regrettable for the substitution of blatant organ show-pipes for the central feature of elevated wineglass pulpit and canopy, for the ugly gallery destroying the effect of the side windows, and for the massive benches replacing box pews.

Lauri D. Cook  
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams  
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.  
District Officer

ABOUT 1939 THE OLD TRUSSES, WHICH HAD DETERIORATED THROUGH DRY ROT, WERE TORN OUT. THE CEILING WAS LOWERED 27" AND NEW TRUSSES WERE PUT IN THEIR PLACE. IT WAS FOUND THAT THE 1906 CROSS PIECE HAD BEEN MADE OF WHITE CEDAR.

LETTER OF THOMAS BOWMAN, GIVEN  
MARCH 17, 1941

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The statement made on pages 3 and 5 that the memorial stones were removed from the demolished Huguenot Church to this Dutch Church at the time of transfer of the congregation from the former, coincident with the erection of a new building by the latter in 1696, is taken from the address given by Francis C. Koehler, cited on page 3, and is found questionable. That the Huguenot Church building was indeed demolished in 1696 is evidently only a surmise from the fact that nine of its congregation are of record as having been received by the Dutch Church of Hackensack in 1696 as members "on certificate from the French church which has come over to us" (a).

Inasmuch as the organization of that Huguenot congregation in 1682 can be deduced from contemporary evidence (a), the erection of a meeting house in that year is more likely than fourteen years later, in 1696, the date inscribed in all three of these memorial stones. This year 1696 being that in which the Huguenots joined this Dutch Church and assisted in the erection of the new building in Hackensack, in one wall of whose successor the stones are still preserved, our judgment is that these stones were carved in honor of that combination of those two events only. A facsimile of one of these stones, the Demarest memorial, has since been made from a rubbing of the original and added to the set of survey drawings of the present church as sheet no. 9.

It is significant that the pastor of this Dutch Church, in an address given in 1869, mentions and illustrates these three stones and two others as relics of the original building of 1696, without any suggestion of their previous existence (b). Incidentally, it is said that the stone inscribed

(a) D.D. Demarest, D.D., The Huguenots on the Hackensack, publ. 1886, p. 17, excerpt from records of the Reformed Dutch Church of Hackensack, with English translation. Cf. Records of the Reformed Dutch Churches of Hackensack and Schraalenburgh, N.J., publ. 1891 in Collections of the Holland Society of N.Y., vol. 1, part 1, pages 2-3, a translation.

(b) Rev. Theo. D. Romeyn, Historical Address delivered on occasion of the Re-Opening and Dedication of the First Reformed (Dutch) Church at Hackensack, N.J., May 2, 1869, publ. 1870, see cuts after p. 131 and on p. 43.



William Day (and) John Stage Anno 1696 is that of the master builders of that original church, and that Day had similarly served the Church at Bergen (Jersey City) in 1680 (c).

Further research has also provided the following abstract from the original "Plan for Rebuilding the Church at Hackensack, A.D. 1790":

1. "The old church shall be broken down --- and upon the same ground the new one shall be erected and of the following dimensions, viz. 48 by 60 feet, with two galleries."
2. The managers are Messrs. John Earle, George Doremus, Henry Berry, Casparus Westervelt, Jacobus Poulison and Isaac Vanderbeck Jr.
3. Voluntary Subscriptions.
4. "The inside of the church shall be furnished with pews, without making any distinction between men's and women's pews."
5. "The pews shall be divided into convenient seats, except so many free seats for strangers as the managers shall think proper, an elder's and a deacon's pew, a pew for ministers' families, (also a magistrate's pew; the latter shall be particularly constructed and have a canopy over it)....disposed of at public auction to the highest bidder."
6. Sale and transfer of seats.

A total of 328 Pounds and 9 shillings was subscribed by the 132 persons signing their names to the Plan, "being at liberty to pay one-third in necessary materials at such prices as the managers choose to agree for - except the first payment which shall be in

(c) Benjamin C. Taylor, D.D. History of the Churches of Hackensack and Schraalenburg, in Annals of the Classis of Bergen of the Reformed Dutch Church, 3rd ed. publ. 1857, p. 174.

cash only. (d)

"Now the people had a mind to work. They brought together the stones and the timber, and the other building materials, and in 1791 reared a house for God.-----Over the entrance way there was placed an inscription stone, with the motto "Een dracht maakt macht": Union makes strength. As in the former house, stones were laid with the initials of the prominent individuals indented thereon so in this house, which was not completed until 1792, there are in the front wall such stones, having cut in them the full names of such persons. They are George Doremus, Albert C. Zabrisky, Henry Berry 1791, John Paulison, Peter Zabrisky 1791, Margaret Hauseman, Isaac Van Gleson, Nickase Terhune, Jacob Brinkorhoff 1792." (d)

Omitted from our previous account is mention of the present tablet set over the center front entrance doorway, transcribed as follows:

F I R S T R E F O R M E D C H U R C H  
of  
H A C K E N S A C K  
Church organized A.D. 1686  
First edifice erected 1696  
Rebuilt 1728  
Rebuilt 1791 Enlarged 1847  
Enlarged and remodelled 1869  
My Father's House John II, XVI

Louis D. Cook  
Supervising Historian 7 May 1941

(d) Taylor, cited in (c) pp. 191-193. See also cut opp. p. 193, captioned "Reformed Dutch Church, Hackensack, New Jersey. Erected 1791. Enlarged 1847," and showing but one front entrance doorway with a window on either side. The latter have since been changed to doorways, probably in 1869.

Source of information - Newark Sunday Call, Feb. 28, 1932.

A goodly number of the old stone churches built by early Dutch settlers, with high wooded steeples, are found throughout Bergen County, N. J. Hackensack is fortunate in having the second oldest Dutch Reformed Church in New Jersey, dating back to 1684, when the congregation was formed. Two years later the first edifice, octagonal in shape, was erected on the same site where the present church now stands, which is a part of the tract of land about six miles square, granted in 1669 to Captain John Berrie.

There are several interesting bits of Revolutionary history connected with this church that deserve special mention. In November, 1776 the soldiers used the church during the retreat of General Lee, and it was the old Peter Zabriski house at which Washington stopped.

In 1780, Washington, Lafayette, and a portion of the American army attended the burial of the Hon. Brigadier General Enoch Poor, who "departed this life at the age of 44 years." In 1824, Lafayette visited this grave, and much affected exclaimed, "Ah, that was one of my generals". The above facts are inscribed on the tombstone in the churchyard. There are many other interesting time and weatherworn headstones of Revolutionary veterans, as well as those of the Civil War, and wars of foreign lands. There is one unique and outstanding headstone, crude in form - that of an old Indian slave woman, with the marking of "H.B. 1713", and a few Indian symbols.

An important feature is the rooster perched high on the steeple. It was sent from Holland in 1691, and has only come down from the perch twice since that date. It is made of copper and looms up clearly in the bright sunshine.

#### NOTE

The above history is taken from "New Jersey Buildings and Biographical Sketches" collected and edited by Mrs. Walter W. Jackson, historian, of Rahway, New Jersey.

*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*